



The Main Construct of the Chinese Bouyei College Learners' ECA

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Abstract: The study in use of the FLCAS investigated 320 Chinese Bouyei college learners' English classroom anxiety (ECA) based on Horwitz *et al's* model of the general FL anxiety construct, i.e., communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety (TA), and fear of negative evaluation (FNE), as well as the relationship between such ECA construct and the four independent variables, i.e., gender, field of study, level of academic year, and level of college. The results illustrate that although the levels of the overall ECA construct were moderate, some individual dependent variables were found as "high-level" anxieties within each of the three ECA components; significant differences were partly found between the three ECA components and the independent variables. Analyses and discussion were made with relative indications for instructors as to what the results really mean and how they could pay attention to for the purpose of helping resolve the problems of the Bouyei college learners with various sorts of anxieties.

Key words: ECA construct; Chinese; Bouyei college learners; implications

1. Introduction

Anxiety is "an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, and worry, and by activation or arousal of the automatic nervous system" (Spielberger, 1972). Psychiatrists (Bradley, 1951; Beck, Emery, & Greenberg, 2005) regard anxiety reactions as a normal, adaptive behavior of an individual with unpleasant emotion from the

clinical angle. They describe such anxiety reactions as the strong, helpless anticipations followed by affliction after the efforts to get out of danger and threat but in vain. According to what they have defined, anxiety can be concluded as one of the mental deviations or aberration, also called psychological abnormality.

However, the problem is that many of these definitions have proven very hard for operation. For instance, there is little agreement among researchers on how best to conceptualize and measure emotional and affective states. These definitions in operation are hereby embodied by further studies of anxiety in the FL context. Some researchers (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Horwitz, 2001) suggest that FL research had neither defined anxiety specific to FL learning nor described the effects of the anxiety on FL in classroom settings. Horwitz et al. (1986) attribute the inconclusive results of previous research to the lack of a reliable and valid measure of anxiety specific to language learning. They not only comprehend FL classroom anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process", but also describe it as a situation-specific anxiety arising from the uniqueness of the formal learning of a FL, specifically from learners' low self-appraisal of their communicative abilities in that language. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) regard FL classroom anxiety as the interference with the acquisition, retention, and production of English as a second language (ESL). In other words, such interference contributes negatively to an "affective filter", which makes a FL learner less responsive to language input and attempt to convey more concrete messages with more time unwillingly spent than those in a non-anxiety-producing setting (Krashen, 1982).

In light of this conceptualization of FL classroom anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) propose a model of the general FL anxiety construct, i.e., communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety (TA), and fear of negative evaluation (FNE). The model has been found to be structurally similar to other models of FL anxiety (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Furthermore, it has withstood psychometric

analyses reasonably well (e.g., Aida, 1994; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999). As a result, it can bring about a consequence of poor English learning (Aida, 1994; Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 2000). Robinson (1991) concludes that communication apprehension (CA) and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) are considered as relatively enduring personality traits. Whereas, test anxiety (TA) is regarded as a state marked by temporary reactions (e.g., worry and nervousness) to an academic or evaluation situation which Aida (1994) concluded as fear of failing the class as a matter of fact. These three components are viewed by Horwitz et al. to have a deleterious effect on FL/L2 acquisition.

Communication apprehension (CA) is defined by Horwitz et al. (1986) as a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people. Many studies have been devoted to exploring the role of CA in learners' interaction. On the one hand, individuals with high CA have been perceived as less dominant (Porter, 1982), and less assertive and less responsive (Kearney & McCroskey, 1980) than those with low CA. Individuals with high CA also have been found to be less satisfied with their abilities to express themselves, to meet people, to lead, and to make decisions (Crozer, 1981). On the other hand, low CA is associated with high communication competence and a positive communication effect (McCroskey, 1984). CA plays a major role in FL anxiety. As Chen (2002) states, people who typically have trouble speaking in groups are likely to experience even greater difficulty speaking in a FL class where they have little control of communicative situation and their performance is constantly dominated by both the teacher and the other learners. As Chen (2002) points out, the special CA during FL learning due to the learner's personal knowledge will certainly produce difficulty in understanding others and making oneself understood; therefore many talkative people become silent in a FL class. Horwitz et al. (1986) argue that the learner, who has immature second language vocabulary although, has to express herself/himself despite her/his mature thoughts and ideas, and this kind of inability either to express oneself or to comprehend another person leads to their frustration and

apprehension. More sources of such anxiety will be discussed later in the section on the causal factors of ECA.

Test anxiety (TA), as the second component of FL classroom anxiety, as explained by Horwitz et al. (1986), refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from fear of failure. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) describe TA as apprehension over academic evaluation. Zeidner (1998) defines TA as anxiety subjectively relating to taking tests and exams, including anxiety related to the threat of failing an exam and the associated negative consequences. TA has not been defined exactly the same way, but one common characteristic of these definitions deals with the anticipated apprehension with failure of academic evaluation based on the abovementioned definitions. With regard to the effect of TA on learners, this could happen at two stages, i.e. at the current period of learning and after having finished the course and learners with high test anxiety, or even the brightest learners with good preparation, probably experience considerable difficulty or often make errors in use of linguistic items (e.g. a word, a grammatical item, etc.) in ways showing faulty or incomplete learning (Tasee, 2009). Due to error making, learners with TA may not be able to focus on what is going on in the classroom. For susceptible or sensitive learners, testing format, such as oral tests for instance, can increase their communicative anxiety (Horwitz et al, 1986) in the FL context. Unfortunately, for highly anxious learners, evaluation is continually required in L2/FL more than in any other academic subjects by the instructor – the only fluent speaker in the class (Horwitz et al, 1986). In fact, test anxiety is quite pervasive in language classrooms due to its continuous performance evaluative nature. In other words, the learners are usually worried very much about not being able to succeed in the test. Hembree (1988) stresses that the FL learners receive tests very often, and even every day, so that they commonly make mistakes when feeling pushed and anxious over time, but actually, their anxiety will negatively affect their performance on the test and their FL proficiency.

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE), the last component of the FLCAS, is closely related to the first and broadly based on the previous two aspects. Watson and Friend (1986) define FNE as apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively. When one over-concerns the attitudes from others towards himself/herself, s/he often fails to take the initiative or participate only minimally in conversation (Aida, 1994). Namely, people who are highly concerned about others' evaluations tend to act in ways that minimize the likelihood of negative assessment, or they may avoid or withdraw from social situations in which others might view them negatively (Oxford, 1999a). When contacting others, such persons would not start any topics but choose to be silent and never break in the conversation between others. In the case of FL, FNE is likely to be in a learner's over concern with academic and personal evaluations of his or her performance and competence in the target language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In the language classroom, this is observable in behaviors such as keeping silent, responding only when necessary or forced to, being passive, and even avoiding class entirely. Therefore, FNE would probably lead to the individual's failing to participate in some classroom activities such as volunteering answers to questions, or initiating questions (Walker, 1997). Despite the similarity to TA, FNE is broader in scope because it is not limited to test-taking situations, rather, as Horwitz et al. (1986) claim, it may occur in any social, evaluative situation, such as interviewing for a job or speaking in FL class. As mentioned previously, FL requires continual evaluation by the teacher as the only fluent speaker in the class (Horwitz et al., 1986), and learners may also be acutely sensitive to the evaluations, real or imagined, of their peers. As a result, various forms of FL learners' behaviors can apparently manifest negative evaluation. The result is that they may sit passively in a classroom, withdraw from classroom activities or cut class so that they can avoid an anxiety situation (Horwitz, 1986; Aida, 1994). Generally, high negative evaluation might hinder FL learners from language improvement and cause them to be left behind other learners in the classroom.

In general, previous research has supported Howitz et al.'s (1986) construct of FL classroom anxiety that CA, TA, and FNE are the mainly existent in-class anxieties, which are likely to hinder learners from learning FL better. Of course, this does not mean that FL classroom anxiety is the simple combination of these fears transferred to FL learning, although the three components provide useful conceptual building blocks for a description of FL classroom anxiety. However, since the three types of anxieties are frequently encountered in the process of FL learning in class and can negatively affect learners' performance and proficiency, the manifestation of them must be firstly taken into consideration so that we could be explicit as to how they affect learners' FL learning as well as what factors they may be resulted from.

Anxiety has been then found existent among about one-third or so of the Chinese college learners as subjects by Chinese scholars who claim that the learners' course grades and interest in English, intentions to continue their study of English, and their CET-4 scores are negatively affected by English classroom anxiety (ECA) (e.g. Chen, 2002; Chen, & Zhang, 2004; Liu, 2006; Tan, 2009; cited by Wei, 2012). Since anxiety associated with FL learning is distinguishable from anxieties experienced in various situations, it is indeed a cause of poor English learning in both individuals and situation (Horwitz, 2001; Gobel, & Matsuda, 2003; Chen, 2002; Chen & Zhang, 2004; Liu, 2006; Tan, 2009). Actually, it interferes with English learning as a potential or even an apparent handicap that hinders college learners from achieving better proficiency. Although researchers in both the foreign countries and China have contributed into the study of ECA, and Wei's (2012) study has illustrated a medium level of the Bouyei college learners' overall FL classroom anxiety, not much is learned about the ECA construct of the college learners from the Chinese ethnic minority groups, especially in the remote mountainous areas. This study therefore aims to make a study of the levels of the main construct (CA, TA, & FNE) of the Chinese Bouyei college learners' ECA, as well as the relationship between their ECA construct

and the four independent variables, i.e., gender, field of study, level of academic year, and level of college. The study is apposed to provide a significant background as a foundation for research of ECA on other particular groups of people in China.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Participants

The informants were 320 (male=127; female=193) Bouyei learners who were randomly selected from the 1st and 2nd year “science-oriented” (n=127), “non science-oriented” (n=110) and “English” (n=83) majors of five local colleges in Guizhou Province, where a majority of the Chinese Bouyei people are dwelling.

2.2 Instruments

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) designed by Horwittz (1986) was administered to the participants. It is a five-point Likert scale with 33 items of belief, which has been partially revised by the present researcher as a tool to understand the different levels of English learners’ special psycho-somatic reactions as well as their influences on FL learning, which may measure the range and quality of the Chinese Bouyei college learners’ main construct of their ECA (Also see Wei, 2012). In the FLCAS are included three components of ECA, that is, communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety (TA), and fear of negative evaluation (FNE).

2.3 Data Collection

The FLCAS was first appropriately translated into Chinese in order to achieve reliable data from the informants. To guarantee adequate sample size, the researcher selected bigger number of the subjects to fill out the closed-ended questionnaire than the number expected. Any incomplete questionnaires were eliminated.

2.4 Data Analyses

The researcher tallied and tabulated the data from the FLCAS in use of the SPSS (Version 16.0) to ascertain the levels of the informants' ECA construct. Attempts were made to find and analyze the correlated relationships between the dependent variables like all the beliefs in the questionnaire and the four independent variables: gender, field of study, level of academic year, and level of college; frequency of anxiety, analysis of variance (ANOVA), the post-hoc Scheffé test, and the chi-square test were used in terms of analysis and interpretation of the data obtained with the assistance of SPSS program (Also see Wei, 2012).

3. Results

3.1 Levels of Overall CA, TA, and FNE

An analysis of frequency levels of the three components of the ECA has been conducted to provide further information on levels of the learners' ECA construct. Table 2 indicates the frequency levels of Bouyei learners' ECA in each component.

Table 1 Levels of Bouyei college learners' overall CA, TA, and FNE

| Variables | Anxiety | | Frequency |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| | Mean | Standard | |
| | Frequency | Deviation (<i>SD</i>) | |
| | Score (\bar{x}) | | Category |
| Overall ECA | 3.10 | .68 | Medium Level |
| (1) CA | 3.23 | .79 | Medium Level |
| (2) TA | 3.27 | .93 | Medium Level |
| (3) FNE | 3.20 | .82 | Medium Level |

According to Table 1, the results show that the holistic mean frequency score across the FLCAS administrated to 320 Bouyei college learners is 3.10 ($SD=.68$). It demonstrates that these 320 Bouyei college learners experienced moderate level of ECA as a whole. Whereas, the mean frequency scores of anxiety levels for overall CA, TA, and FNE are 3.23 ($SD=.79$), 3.27 ($SD=.93$), and 3.20 ($SD=.82$) respectively. The results reveal that the levels of the learners' overall CA, TA,

and FNE were moderate.

However, the percentage of frequency category (low, medium, high) of each individual CA, TA, and FNE has been calculated to examine the levels of anxiety of each variable in particular. Tables 2 & 3 indicate the number of items and its percentage for each individual anxiety variables based on the FLCAS results.

Table 2 Reports on the Levels of the learners' Individual CA, TA, and FNE

| Individual FL Classroom Anxiety | Mean (M) | S.D. | Level Category |
|--|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| (1) Communication Apprehension (CA) | | | |
| 14. I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers. | 3.49 | 1.254 | High |
| 18. I feel confident when I speak in English class. | 3.58 | 1.247 | High |
| 9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class. | 3.43 | 1.374 | High |
| 29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says. | 3.48 | 1.267 | High |
| 1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class. | 3.08 | 1.351 | Medium |
| 4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English. | 3.35 | 1.437 | Medium |
| 13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class. | 2.36 | 1.299 | Medium |
| 27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class. | 3.12 | 1.351 | Medium |
| 30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak in English. | 3.29 | 1.299 | Medium |
| 32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English. | 3.24 | 1.254 | Medium |

| (2) Test Anxiety (TA) | | | |
|--|------|-------|---------------|
| 8. I am usually not at ease during tests in my English class. | 3.48 | 1.436 | <i>High</i> |
| 10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class. | 3.51 | 1.414 | <i>High</i> |
| 25. English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind in tests. | 3.59 | 1.368 | <i>High</i> |
| 21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get. | 2.51 | 1.367 | <i>Low</i> |
| (3) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) | | | |
| 20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class. | 3.72 | 1.302 | <i>High</i> |
| 33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. | 3.89 | 1.220 | <i>High</i> |
| 2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class. | 3.31 | 1.340 | <i>Medium</i> |
| 3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class. | 3.15 | 1.440 | <i>Medium</i> |
| 7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am. | 3.12 | 1.400 | <i>Medium</i> |
| 23. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do. | 3.23 | 1.321 | <i>Medium</i> |
| 24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students. | 3.03 | 1.397 | <i>Medium</i> |
| 31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English. | 2.87 | 1.322 | <i>Medium</i> |
| 19. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. | 2.44 | 1.319 | <i>Low</i> |

Notes: Items 5, 6, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 22, and 26 do not belong to any of the three components.

Table 3 Summary of levels of individual anxiety items in CA, TA, and FNE

| Anxiety Variables | Low Level | | Medium Level | | High Level | |
|----------------------|-----------|------|--------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| (1) CA | 0/0 | 0/0 | 6/10 | 60% | 4/10 | 40% |
| (2) TA | 1/4 | 25% | 0 | 0 | 3/4 | 75% |
| (3) FNE | 1/9 | 11% | 6/9 | 67% | 2/9 | 22% |
| Overall | 2/23 | 8.7% | 12/23 | 52.2% | 9/23 | 39.1% |

As can be seen from the above two tables, of all twenty-three anxiety items, twelve (52.5%) fall into “medium level” category, while nine (39.1%) are into “high level” category, and only two (8.7%) into “low level” category. These results further support the statement that the Bouyei college learners suffered medium level of ECA in general (Also see Wei, 2012).

Nevertheless, for the component of CA, four items (i.e., items 14, 18, 9, & 29) (40%) out of ten could be classified as “high level” anxieties, while six items (i.e., items 1, 4, 13, 27, 30, & 32) (60%) out of ten could be classified as “medium level” anxieties and none has been found in “low level” anxieties. This indicates that the learners would be nervous speaking with native speakers, did not feel confident when speaking in class, started to panic when having to speak without preparation in English class, and got nervous when they did not understand every word the English teacher said; whereas, they could feel moderately worried in all the other situations.

For TA, three items (i.e., items 8, 10, & 25) (75%) out of four could be classified as “high level” anxieties, while only one item (i.e., item 21) (25%) could be a “low level” anxiety. The results show that the learners could be most anxious during tests, worried about the consequences of failing English class, as well as about getting left behind in tests, but they felt less confused gradually as they studied more for a language test. It is noteworthy that although there is no item found in the “medium level” category, and the number of items in the “high level” category is bigger than that in the “low level” category, the learners’ overall TA still falls into “medium level” category based on the sum of the mean frequency scores of the four items.

For FNE, two items (i.e., items 20, & 33) (22%) out of nine could be classified

as “high level” anxieties; one item (i.e., item 19) (11%) could be a “low level” anxiety, whereas, six items (i.e., items 2, 3, 7, 23, 24, & 31) (67%) indicate “medium level” anxieties. The results demonstrate that the learners could be most worried with hearts pounding when going to be called on in English class, and feel most nervous when asked questions that they had not prepared in advance; they might feel moderately worried about making mistakes, being not so good at English as others and then laughed at by others, and speaking English in front of others in class, whereas they might feel less afraid that their English teacher is ready to correct every mistake they made.

3.2 The Relationship between the Learners’ ECA Construct and the Four Independent Variables

An ANOVA was conducted to determine the statistical differences and patterns of variation of three independent variables, i.e., gender, field of study, level of academic year, and level of college, while post-hoc Sheffé tests were used to obtain the differences and patterns of variation of one independent variable, i.e., field of study.

3.2.1 Gender and the Learners’ ECA Construct

The following table indicates the relationship between male and female in relation to the pattern of variation of the learners’ ECA construct.

Table 4 Summary of variation in the learners’ ECA construct according to gender

| Gender | Male (n=127) | | Female (n=193) | | Significance | Pattern of Variation |
|---------|--------------|------|----------------|-----|--------------|----------------------|
| | Mean (M) | SD | Mean (M) | SD | Level | |
| (1) CA | 3.05 | .85 | 3.37 | .72 | .001* | Female>Male |
| (2) TA | 3.12 | 1.04 | 3.36 | .85 | .55 | / |
| (3) FNE | 2.91 | .80 | 3.38 | .78 | .001* | Female>Male |

Significance level $p < .05$ *

The table shows that the mean of males’ overall CA was 3.05 ($SD=.85$), while the mean of females’ was 3.37 ($SD=.72$). A significant difference between male

and female learners was found ($p=.001$), indicating that female Bouyei college learners experienced higher level of ECA than their male counterparts when participating activities associated with communication in class.

Different from the above findings, the mean of males' overall TA was 3.12 ($SD=1.04$), while the mean of females' was 3.36 ($SD=.85$). No significant difference between male and female learners was found ($p=.55$), indicating that both female and male Bouyei college learners worried about tests nearly at the similar level.

The results in relation to FNE support the findings on the overall anxiety and CA, but not TA. The mean of males' overall CA was 2.91 ($SD=.85$), while the mean of females' was 3.38 ($SD=.78$). A significant difference between male and female learners was found ($p=.001$), indicating that female Bouyei college learners had higher level of FNE than their male counterparts.

3.2.2 Field of Study and the Learners' ECA Construct

Table 5 indicates the relationship between learners in the three fields of study (science- =127; non-science-=110; English=83) in relation to the pattern of variation of the overall CA, TA, and FNE.

Table 5 Summary of variation in the learners' ECA construct by field of study

| Field of Study | Fields in Multiple Comparison | | Significance Level | | Pattern of Variation |
|----------------|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------|---|
| | | Mean | SD | | |
| (1) CA | Science- Non-science- | 3.44 vs 3.18 | .69 vs .83 | .034* | Science-> Non- science-~ English |
| | English | 3.44 vs 3.02 | .69 vs .80 | .001* | |
| | Non-science- Science- | 3.18 vs 3.44 | .83 vs .69 | .034* | |
| | English | 3.18 vs 3.02 | .83 vs .80 | .342 | |
| | English Science- | 3.02 vs 3.44 | .80 vs .69 | .001* | |
| | Non-science- | 3.02 vs 3.18 | .80 vs .83 | .342 | |
| | Science- Non-science- | 3.50 vs 3.22 | .87 vs .91 | .072 | |

| | | | | | | |
|---------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| | | English | 3.50 vs 2.98 | .87 vs.95 | .001* | Science-> |
| (2) TA | Non-Science- | Science- | 3.22 vs 3.50 | .91 vs.87 | .072 | English |
| | | English | 3.22 vs 2.98 | .91 vs.95 | .188 | |
| | English | Science- | 2.98 vs 3.50 | .95 vs.87 | .001 | |
| | | Non-science- | 2.98 vs 3.22 | .95 vs.91 | .188 | |
| <hr/> | | | | | | |
| | Science- | Non-science- | 3.30 vs 3.20 | .79 vs.86 | .597 | |
| | | English | 3.30 vs 3.03 | .79 vs.80 | .054 | |
| (3) FNE | Non-science- | Science- | 3.20 vs 3.30 | .86 vs.79 | .597 | / |
| | | English | 3.20 vs 3.03 | .86 vs.80 | .354 | |
| | English | Science- | 3.03 vs 3.30 | .80 vs.79 | .054 | |
| | | Non-science- | 3.03 vs 3.20 | .80 vs.86 | .354 | |

Significance level $p < .05$ *

Table 5 shows that the means of science-oriented, non-science-oriented, and English majors' overall CA were 3.44 ($SD=.69$), 3.18 ($SD=.83$), and 3.02 ($SD=.80$) respectively. Significant differences between science-oriented and non-science-oriented majors, as well as between science-oriented and English majors, were found ($p < .05$); however, no significant difference between non-science-oriented and English majors was found ($p=.333$). This further indicates that science-oriented majors might have higher level of CA in FL class than non-science-oriented and English majors; while non-science-oriented and English majors might have CA at the similar level.

Similar results have been found in the relationship between the overall TA and the learners' field of study. A significant difference was found ($p=.001$) between science-oriented ($M=3.50$, $SD=.87$) and English ($M=2.98$, $SD=.95$) majors, but no significant difference was found ($p>.05$) both between science-oriented ($M=3.50$, $SD=.87$) and non-science-oriented ($M=3.22$, $SD=.91$) majors, and between English ($M=2.98$, $SD=.95$) and non-science-oriented ($M=3.22$, $SD=.91$) majors. This reveals that science-oriented majors had higher level of TA than

non-science-oriented and English majors; while science-oriented and non-science-oriented majors, as well as English and non-science-oriented majors, might have TA as much as each other's.

Nevertheless, the statistic displays different findings in relation to FNE. According to Table 4, the means of science-oriented, non-science-oriented, and English majors' FNE were 3.30 ($SD=.79$), 3.20 ($SD=.86$), and 3.03 ($SD=.80$) respectively. No significant differences were found ($p>.05$) between any of the three fields of study, indicating that the learners in the three fields might have similar level of FNE in FL class.

3.2.3 Level of Academic Year and the Learners' ECA Construct

Table 6 indicates the relationship between learners in the 1st and 2nd year in relation to the pattern of variation of their CA, TA, and FNE.

Table 6 Summary of variation in the learners' ECA construct by level of academic year

| Level of Academic Year | Freshmen (n=162) | | Sophomores (n=158) | | Signific ance Level | Pattern of Variation |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Mean | SD | Mea | SD | | |
| | n | | | | | |
| (1) CA | 3.46 | .70 | 3.01 | .81 | .001* | Freshmen> Sophomores |
| (2) TA | 3.49 | .89 | 3.05 | .91 | .001* | Freshmen> Sopho mores |
| (3) FNE | 3.26 | .79 | 3.13 | .85 | .131 | / |

Significance level $p < .05$ *

According to the statistic shown in Table 6, the mean of freshmen's overall CA is 3.46 ($SD=.70$), while the mean of sophomores' was 3.01 ($SD=.81$). A significant difference between freshmen and sophomores was also found ($p=.001$), indicating that the 1st-year learners had higher level of fear than the 2nd-year learners when communicating with others in FL class.

Supportive results were obtained according to the statistic in relation to TA. The mean of the freshmen's overall TA was 3.49 ($SD=.89$) while the mean of the sophomores' was 3.05 ($SD=.91$). A significant difference between freshmen and sophomores was found ($p=.001$), indicating that the 1st-year Bouyei college learners felt worried about tests in FL class more than their 2nd-year counterparts.

However, concerning the pattern of variation in FNE, the mean of the freshmen's overall FNE was 3.26 ($SD=.79$), while the mean of the sophomores' was 3.13 ($SD=.85$). The results show no significant difference between freshmen and sophomores ($p=1.31$), indicating that the 1st-year and 2nd-year Bouyei college learners experienced fear of negative evaluation in class nearly at the same level.

3.2.4 Level of College and the Learners' ECA Construct

Table 7 indicates the relationship between learners at specialized college and undergraduate college in relation to the pattern of variation in frequency of the overall FL anxiety as well as their CA, TA, and FNE.

Table 7 Summary of variation in the learners' ECA construct by level of college

| Level of College | Specialized Colleges (n=153) | | Undergraduate Colleges (n=167) | | Significance Level | Pattern of Variation |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|-----------------------|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| (1) CA | 3.30 | .75 | 3.19 | .82 | .194 | / |
| (2) TA | 3.36 | .91 | 3.20 | .95 | .117 | / |
| (3) FNE | 3.30 | .83 | 3.10 | .81 | .024* | Specialized College> Undergraduate College |

Significance level $p < .05$ *

According to the statistical results, the mean of the specialized college learners' CA was 3.30 ($SD=.75$), while the mean of the undergraduate college learners' was 3.19 ($SD=.82$). No significant difference between specialized college learners and undergraduate college learners was found ($p=.194$), indicating that

Bouyei college learners at lower-level college were anxious about communication in FL class nearly as much as their counterparts at higher-level college.

The statistic indicates supportive results with respect to TA. The mean of the specialized college learners' overall TA was 3.36 ($SD=.91$), while the mean of the undergraduate college learners' was 3.20 ($SD=.95$). Again, no significant difference between specialized college learners and undergraduate college learners was found ($p=.117$), illustrating that Bouyei college learners at lower-level and higher-level colleges seemed to have the same level of TA.

Unlike the results mentioned above, a different pattern of variation is illustrated in FNE. The mean of the specialized college learners' overall FNE was 3.30 ($SD=.83$), while the mean of the undergraduate college learners' was 3.10 ($SD=.81$). A significant difference between specialized college learners and undergraduate college learners was found ($p=.024$), indicating that Bouyei college learners at lower-level college had higher level of TA in FL class than their counterparts at higher-level college.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Overall ECA Construct

The results demonstrate in general that the Bouyei college learners experienced a medium level of both overall ECA and the three components of ECA, i.e., CA, TA, and FNE. These findings reveal that ECA is existent in the Chinese Bouyei college learners, consistent with previous studies (Chen, 2002; Chen & Zhang, 2004; Liu, 2006; Tan, 2009; Wei, 2012).

In terms of CA, Bouyi learners had "high level" anxiety when they spoke in English class, even without preparation, or with native speakers, and when they were not able to understand every word the English teacher said. According to Crozer (1981), individuals with such high level of CA have been found to be less satisfied with their abilities to express themselves, to meet people, to lead, and to

make decisions. Some Bouyei college learners regarded *Low FL Ability* as one of the main causal factors responsible for their ECA as a result in the present investigation (See Wei, 2012).

As for TA, the learners suffered “high-level” anxiety, i.e., they were usually not at ease during tests in English class, and worried about the consequences of failing English class, as well as about getting left behind in tests. Accordingly, with such high level of test anxiety, the Bouyei learners may not be able to focus on what is going on in the classroom, or even after having finished the course; moreover, they may experience considerable difficulty or often make errors in use of linguistic items even if they are the brightest learners with good preparation, as also claimed in the previous study by Tasee (2009).

In terms of FNE, only two items out of nine referred to “high level” of anxiety, which reveals that the learners could feel their heart pounding when they were going to be called on in English class, and they got nervous when asked questions which they hadn’t prepared in advance. However, as stated by Aida (1994), these situations, along with others at the medium level, may embody the attitudes of the learners that can be over-concerned from others towards himself/herself and hence cause him/her to fail to take the initiative or participate only minimally in conversation.

Obviously, based on the theory of “Affective Filter” (See Brown, 1980), the high-level anxieties mentioned above, along with other medium-level anxieties, are likely to become handicaps at various levels that stop the Bouyei college learners from learning English better, because the learners with such anxieties are more engaged in irrelevant information input and hence lost more opportunities to receive input related to their English learning.

It must be noted that the ECA frequently reported by the Bouyei learners was related to TA, followed by CA and then FNE respectively in comparing the mean frequency scores. The results might refer to that tests are what most disturbed Bouyei college learners. It seems to confirm the long-existent

phenomenon of “exam-oriented” higher education system in China, which indicates the necessity of further research in future.

4.2 How the Bouyei College Learners’ ECA Construct Relates to the Four Independent Variables

4.2.1 Gender

The findings of the present investigation also indicate that female Bouyei college learners’ overall level of ECA and levels of CA and FNE were significantly higher than their male counterparts’; whereas, there was no significant relationship between male and female in the anxiety level concerning TA as well as other individual anxieties in the three components, which is different from Chapell et al.’s (2005) findings that female undergraduates had significantly higher test anxiety than male undergraduates.

Through the findings of the present study, it is suggested that gender of the Bouyei college learners was significantly related to the levels of ECA. This is supported by previous studies (Cheng, 2002; Chapell et al., 2005; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2005) that have also claimed female learners to be more anxious than male learners. This may be because females attach great importance to expressing themselves verbally, while males appear to value facility with visual and spatial information, although other studies found no significant difference between males and females in FL anxiety (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2005; Dewaele, 2007) in some aspects.

4.2.2 Field of Study

Field of study has also been found related to the Bouyei college learners’ ECA in the present study, which is very much different from Chen’s (2002) study in which no significant differences were found in these three dimensions. According to the mean scores, science-oriented majors asserted most frequently experiencing overall ECA, as well as CA and TA; while no significant difference was found between non science-oriented majors and English majors in the level of overall ECA, as well as between any of the three fields of study in the level of

FNE, as also found in Chen's (2002) investigation. On the other hand, non science-oriented majors more than science-oriented majors and English majors were found being nervous when speaking English with native speakers in English class, which still has no other support in the previous studies and indicates the value of further study in future.

4.2.3 Level of Academic Year

Level of Academic Year has been found to result in the learners' overall ECA as well as CA and TA to vary significantly. That is, freshmen experienced overall ECA as well as CA and TA more than sophomores, although no significant difference was found between freshmen and sophomores in the level of FNE. This might reveal that the Chinese Bouyei college learners were more anxious in the first year and less anxious in the second year with respect to most aspects, probably because their adaptability in English learning had been enhanced through their experience of one year's study at college. These findings were different from Cheng's (2002) and Elkhafaifi's (2005) studies that found no differences between the 1st- and 2nd-year college learners learning English in northern Taiwan, China, as well as the 1st- and 2nd-year college learners learning Arabic in the U.S.A.

4.2.4 Level of College

The research findings have indicated that Bouyei college learners at lower-level college reported experiencing ECA nearly as much as their counterparts at higher-level college in terms of overall ECA, CA, TA, and other individual anxieties; whereas, the Bouyei college learners at lower-level college underwent FNE more than their counterparts at higher-level college. Nevertheless, the study by Chen (2002) found extremely significant difference between learners in both TA and FNE, but no significant difference in CA. To be more exact, the Bouyei college learners at lower-level college (3-year-system specialized college) were more worried about being negatively evaluated than the learners at higher-level college (4-year-system undergraduate college), but shared the same level of communication apprehension and test anxiety with them.

5. Conclusion

The present study has analyzed and discussed the findings in relation to the levels of the Chinese Bouyei learners' ECA construct, i.e., CA, TA, and FNE, as well as the relationship between such construct and the four independent variables. The results reveal that although the levels of their overall ECA construct were moderate, some individual dependent variables were found as "high-level" anxieties within each of the three ECA components. Both "medium-level" and "high-level" are likely to become handicaps that may prevent the Bouyei learners from learning English better. It is noteworthy that TA, followed by CA and then FNE were frequently reported the Bouyei informants, which accounts for the so-called "exam-oriented" higher education system also long existent in the Chinese mountainous ethnic areas. The findings are thought to be significant because the Bouyei college learners have different levels of ECA construct due to different gender, major field of study, academic years, and level of college, which may indicate that different teaching methods and approaches must be applied by the teacher to help resolve the problems of the Bouyei learners with various sorts of anxieties related to these independent variables via establishing proper environments to stimulate their interest and motivation in English class. Furthermore, the deleterious effect of ECA must be well recognized by both the teacher and the learners; especially, as stated by Wei (2012), the teacher may make an effort to teach his/her lessons that would bring about less debilitating anxiety to learners but more encouragements and motivation stimulations to facilitate their learning with more confidence, as well as help learners to actively cope with their FL classroom anxiety for better FL proficiency.

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